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# THE FOLK ARTS EDUCATOR

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Volume 1, Issue 2

Fall 1999

## Interviews Rule!

As you look through curriculum resource materials, how often have you seen a lesson that includes the suggested activity, "Have each student interview a person who \_\_\_\_\_". The blank may be filled with "does craftwork" or "is of another generation," whatever fits the topic of the lesson. Such suggestions imply that an interview is a quickly accomplished, stand-alone activity with no preparation or follow-up work necessary.

Such suggestions sorely underrate the power, versatility and yes, amount of work, present in a well-crafted interview. Thankfully, many educators have taken the time to describe their and their students' experiences with interviewing, and have carefully articulated why they find it such a powerful pedagogical tool.

One of the most passionate and comprehensive descriptions of how a teacher might incorporate interviewing into her curriculum comes from Paula Rogovin, a twenty-five year veteran teacher. While still meeting required New York state standards, Paula has made interviewing the core of her inquiry-based multicultural curriculum for her first grade class. As she explains in the preface of her book, *Classroom Interviews: A World of Learning* (1998), "Interviews are the central focus of our inquiry studies. They are our major source of new information and concepts. The interview is seeable, hearable, touchable. It is right there in front of the children and teacher. Through our

questions, discussions, role playing, and note taking, the children are part of the interview, making interviews a very active form of learning." (p. xvi)

The interviews her class conducts take place as a whole group activity. Typically, a person is invited into the classroom to be interviewed because they are able to address some aspect of that year's theme. For the theme of "People at Work," for instance, the class interviewed school bus drivers, workers at the construction site down the block, a union organizer and the coordinator of a soup kitchen, among many others. All were family, friends or acquaintances of the teachers' or students' families. The key was to spread the word that such contacts were valued and desired.

The day before an interview, the children work with Paula to prepare questions and practice asking them. They begin the interview not with a question directed to the guest, but with Paula asking her students to tell the guest what they already know about the topic. This is helpful to the interviewee because then he knows just where to start, and it's validating to the students in that their prior knowledge is being honored.

Interviewing is a skill that develops over time and with continued practice. An isolated interview assignment, rather than a project that involves conducting a series of interviews, may leave children with undeveloped skills and no experience of the power of a well-conducted interview. Paula helps her students develop questioning skills by refocusing their questions as needed, and by modeling effective interviewing techniques. In addition, when children conduct interviews frequently, the form becomes familiar and their skills become honed; in one year Paula and class conducted seventy interviews, and their skills grew proportionately

A unique aspect of Paula's class interviews is their slow pace. If a confusing or complex point is raised, she'll stop the interview to have her children role-play the situation just described. This helps their understanding, and can also work to emphasize a particular concept. She will also interrupt the flow of the interview to have the children take notes. Most people, no matter their age, find it difficult to listen and write at the same time. Stopping to write or draw notes helps the children to process the information, leading to better retention, and allows those learners who are not strong in auditory skills to use another modality.

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These slow-paced interviews are relatively short, lasting about a half-hour. Consequently, the speaker never gets to cover all the information she has to offer. Nevertheless, the interviews provide a plethora of rich details. "In each person are stories, songs and dances, joys and hardships, rituals and customs, skills and talents, life experiences, varying degrees of formal education, special recipes, and opinions that constitute the individual's history and culture....What we can learn from interviews is often far beyond the reach of any textbook." (p.22). Activities that build off the interview, such as making books about the interviewed person and murals about their area of knowledge, are ways that Paula's students continue their research.

If first graders can conduct the wonderful interviews described in *Classroom Interviews*, then so can older students. The form of the interview should be adapted to the grade level, of course, but the overall goal—to discover what we hold in common with others as well as what is different in our lives remains the same.

Depending on the specific topic of the interviews, many academic standards can be achieved through the methodology of interviewing, as demonstrated in an oral history project conducted in southern New Mexico, "Preserving Community/*Cuentos del Varrío*." (*Cuentos del Varrío* means "folktales from the neighborhood," with the traditional Spanish word for neighborhood, *barrio*, replaced by the local term, *varrío*.) The project taught high school students how to interview the elders of their communities in order to capture the local history and language of the region. At the same time, it empowered these at-risk students as they explored their ancestry and cultural background. Teacher Pauline Staski carefully designed the project to meet state educational competencies, so the interviews were combined with research, discussion, and writing.

In Wisconsin, interviews can be used to meet the state's content standards in at least the following areas:

- In Social Studies, *Geography: People, Places, and Environments*
- In Social Studies, *The Behavioral Sciences: Individuals, Institutions, and Society*
- In English Language Arts, *Research and Inquiry*



Eli, a sixth grader at Gibraltar School in Fish Creek, WI, interviews Tom Murray, proprietor of The Irish House, about St. Patrick's Day and other Irish traditions.

- In English Language Arts, *Language*

In addition, many individual performance standards can be met depending on the specific content and design of the project.

You can review the interview-related materials used in "Preserving Community/*Cuentos del Varrío*" on-line at <http://web.nmsu.edu/~publhist/ohindex.html>. They have a somewhat formal feel to them, as oral historians associated with the project prepared them, and have those professional standards embedded in them.

Nevertheless, they would be useful for a teacher who wants to develop an interview-based unit.

Many other resources exist that can help anyone with the how-to's of interviewing, such as:

- Edward Ives, *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History* (1995),
- David Taylor, *Documenting Maritime Folklife* (1992), available on-line from the

American Folklife Center at <http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/maritime/>,

- Peter Bartis, *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques* (1990), available on-line from the American Folklife Center at <http://lcweb.loc.gov/folklife/fieldwk.html>,
- Majorie Hunt, *The Grand Generation: Interviewing Guide and Questionnaire* (1987),
- \*Steve Zeitlin et al., *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (1992), Yellow Moon Press.

Other recommended resources that specifically focus on children as interviewers include:

- Michigan State University Museum, *4-H Folkpatterns Leader's Guide; Foodways: A 4-H Folkpatterns Project; and Family Folklore: A 4-H Folkpatterns Project*; see <http://museum.msu.edu/museum/esp/folkpatterns/index.html>,
- \*Shari Davis & Benny Ferdman, *Nourishing the Heart: A Guide to Intergenerational Arts Projects in the Schools* (1993),
- \*Cynthia Stokes Brown, *Like It Was: A Complete Guide to Writing Oral History* (1988).

\*These books are available from The Culture Catalogue, now on-line at [www.citylore.org/shop/](http://www.citylore.org/shop/). ❖

# Calendar of Wisconsin Folklife Events

## OCTOBER-DECEMBER

*All event information is subject to change. Some events have fees.*

*Please confirm details with the host organization.*

September 15-October 27, *workshop series*

### **Día de los Muertos**

Latino Arts, Milwaukee

(414) 384-3100

Make *ofrendas* (altars), *calaveras* (skeletons), *papel picado* (cut paper), *flores de muertos* (paper flowers) and ceramics. 4:00-5:30 PM for ages 8 & older.

❖ *Funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

September '99-August '00, *exhibit*

### **"EthniCity: Milwaukee's Multicultural Heritage"**

Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee

(414) 273-8288

Exhibit featuring artifacts, documents and photographs that trace Milwaukee's ethnic heritage through the centuries. Guided tours for school groups available.

October-November, *exhibit*

### **Oneida Iroquois baskets**

Oneida Nation Museum, Oneida

(920) 869-2768

Historic and contemporary Oneida Iroquois baskets from Wisconsin and New York will be on display.

Guided tours for school groups available.

October-December, *exhibit*

### **"Ethnic Architecture of Eastern Wisconsin"**

Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee

(414) 273-8288

Photographs showing the way in which European ethnic communities shaped Wisconsin's built environment during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Guided tours for school groups available.

October 2, *workshop*

### **World Dance Workshop**

Wisconsin Dance Council

Lathrop Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison

(608) 263-2475

This day-long movement-oriented workshop will feature master classes in Chinese, Flamenco, Irish, Pilates and Creative Dance.

October 2, *event*

### **Harvest Family Day**

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

The whole family is invited to enjoy an afternoon of harvest-time celebrations. Participatory activities and demonstrations for all ages include Rag Rug Weaving, Cider Pressing, Pumpkin Carving. 1:00-4:00 PM

October 7, *concert*

### **Louis Bashell Polka Band**

Milwaukee County Historical Society

Pere Marquette Park, Milwaukee

(414) 273-8288

Bashell is a National Heritage Fellowship recipient, renowned for his Slovenian accordion skills and fine band leadership. Despite being over 75 years of age, Bashell still puts on a great show. Noon.

❖ *Funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

Beginning October 7, *workshop*

### **Beads, Body, and Soul:**

#### **Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe**

Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison

(608) 263-2246

This three-session program will have fall and spring components. It's offered in conjunction with an upcoming exhibit of the same name (see calendar listing for January). In the fall component, highlights include a slide-illustrated preview of the exhibition, in-depth exposure to the cultural chromatics of the Yoruba, and hands-on activities that can be adapted to classroom activities. The \$9 registration fee includes beading supplies and an exhibit curriculum resource unit (98 pages, plus 20 slides) which participants keep.

October 8, *concert*

### **Monroe Swiss Singers**

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

The fifty-member, award-winning Monroe Swiss Singers present an evening of Swiss/German songs, music, costumes and customs. The music includes singing, yodeling, accordion-playing, instrumental dance music, Swiss flag-throwing, alpenhorn-blowing and musical coin rolling. 7:30 PM

❖ *Funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

October 15, *concert*

### **Farewell Performance of the Goose Island Ramblers**

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

Over the last 36 years, the Goose Island Ramblers—Wendy Whitford, George Gilbertson and Bruce Bullerud—have played old time schottisches, polkas, waltzes, two-steps, fiddle tunes and old country songs on everything from fiddle to the electric toilet plunger. Bid farewell to a Wisconsin treasure! 7:30 PM

❖ *A Paths of Tradition concert funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

October 22 – 24

**Swedish Music Dance Weekend**

with Edwin's Spelman Roo Lester

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

November 3, 10:30 AM, *performance*

November 4, 10:30 AM & 7:00 PM, *performance*

**Día de los Muertos**

Latino Arts, Milwaukee

(414) 384-3100

In this celebration commemorating the Day of the Dead, Ruby Nelda Pérez will present her one-woman show *Doña Rosita's Stories to Die For*, a unique combination of conversation, humor and cooking. An accompanying exhibit highlights Día de los Muertos art forms, including *ofrendas* (altars) created by local children and artists.

❖ *Funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

November 8, *lecture*

**"The Anguish of Snails:**

**Native American Culture of Non-Natives"**

1418 Van Hise Hall,

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Sponsored by the Folklore Program & American Indian

Studies Program

(608) 924-4000

Barre Toelken, director of the Folklore Program at Utah State University, will give a public lecture, drawing on more than forty years of field research among southwestern Navajos and native peoples in the Pacific Northwest. 4:30 PM

November 10-December 15, *workshop series*

**Las Posadas Workshop**

Latino Arts, Milwaukee

(414) 384-3100

Learn how to make Christmas crafts from Latin America, such as *piñatas* and ornaments.

❖ *Funded in part by the Wisconsin Arts Board*

November 13, *singing*

**13<sup>th</sup> Annual Southern WI Shape-Note Singing Day**

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

Shape-note, or *fasola*, is an American tradition of participatory choral singing. The shape-note designation refers to the way notes are presented on the staff. Everyone is welcome; no experience is necessary. Loaner books will be available. 10:30 AM

November 19-21, *festival*

**Holiday Folk Fair International**

Wisconsin State Fair Park, West Allis

International Institute of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

(414) 225-6220

Holiday Folk Fair International is one of the largest annual multi-cultural festivals in the nation. Begun in 1943, it promotes racial, ethnic, and cultural understanding. Dancing, shopping, exploring exhibits, and tasting foods of many traditions are available. Education Day allows participation in structured workshops on cultural awareness. Kinderland provides an opportunity for younger children to experience various cultures through ethnic games and activities. 4-11 PM Fri, 10 AM-11 PM Sat, 10 AM-7 PM Sunday.

November 20, *dance*

**Mike Rydeski & the Polka Jacks**

Folklore Village Farm, Dodgeville

(608) 924-4000

Playing accordion since 1946, Mike Rydeski has led the Polka Jacks since the 1980s. By singing in Polish, Slovenian, Croatian, and English, the group acknowledges their Gogebic Iron Range, Michigan roots. 7:30 PM

December 2-3, *workshop*

**Treaties, Traditions, & Tribal Sovereignty:**

**Exploring Tribal Identity in Wisconsin**

The Pyle Center,

University of Wisconsin, Madison

Sponsored by UW School of Education, State

Historical Society of WI, WI Dept of Public Instruction

(608) 262-2451

Learn about the variety of tribal cultures within Wisconsin; listen to and interact with individuals from a number of tribes and settings; examine critical historical and current issues from tribal perspectives; develop teaching strategies that integrate new materials on tribal identity with the state social studies standards.

January 29-May 21, *exhibit*

**Beads, Body, and Soul:**

**Art and Light in the Yoruba Universe**

Elvehjem Museum of Art, Madison

(608) 263-2246

150 luminous beaded objects (ceremonial regalia, crowns, and contemporary paintings and sculpture) representing the concepts of color, light and philosophy of Yoruba peoples of Africa and their descendants in the Americas (Brazil, Cuba, and the USA). Guided tours for school groups available.

## **NEW! Arts Strand at WEAC Conference: Arts Education Institute**

The Wisconsin Partners in Arts Education are joining with WEAC to offer a series of workshops at the 1999 conference. The Arts Education Institute is for classroom teachers who desire to more effectively incorporate the arts into their teaching. The goals of the Institute are to demonstrate that the arts are discreet disciplines; to give classroom teachers the knowledge and the resources necessary to integrate academic content and arts experiences; and to emphasize dance and theatre, which are not well represented in our schools. The Arts Education Institute will focus on sharing expertise, highlight community resources, and provide hands-on experiences. The Wisconsin Partners in Arts Education will also staff a booth in the Convention Exhibit Hall where teachers will be able to receive one-on-one consultation about how to integrate the arts into their classrooms.

**(1) Arts Education Institute Keynote Speech & Performance** – Thursday, Oct. 28, 1:00-2:45 P.M.  
Keynote Speaker: Margaret Hasse, former Executive Director, Minnesota Alliance for Arts Education. Keynote Performance: Excerpts from the musical "Working", presented by Shorewood High School Theatre Department students, Shorewood High School, Milwaukee

**(2) Using Movement to Teach Language Arts: A Hands-On Activity** – Thursday, Oct. 28, 3:00-4:45 P.M.  
Mary Elliott and Liza Brown, Wisconsin Dance Council, Madison These two professional dancers and educators will explore the links between language – specifically, poetry and antonyms -- and movement. Participants will be on their feet and will use movement in a fun and "doable" way!

**(3) Mavericks, Cohorts, and Community** – Friday, Oct. 29, 11:00 A.M. -12:45 P.M. Representatives from three Wisconsin school districts – Kettle Moraine, Suring, and Onalaska -- will share information and observations on the ways in which they have enriched the education of their students through innovative and creative arts programs.

**(4) Arts and Community Resources Panel** -- Friday, Oct. 29, 1:00-2:45 P.M. Member organizations of the Wisconsin Partners in Arts Education (Wisconsin Arts Board, Wisconsin Assembly for Local Arts, Wisconsin Alliance for Arts Education, Wisconsin Dance Council, Wisconsin Art Education Association, and Wisconsin School Music Association) will discuss the many statewide and regional arts and cultural resources, opportunities, and programs available to Wisconsin educators and administrators. ❖

## **Arts in Education Grants**

The Wisconsin Arts Board annually provides grants to schools and other organizations throughout the state as part of the Community Development Project (CDP) Grants program. A special emphasis within the CDP program is Arts in Education. The Arts in Education area of emphasis supports creating and providing opportunities for quality arts experiences for all Wisconsin K-12 students. Any public or private K-12 school or community group can apply.

The program's goals are to involve students and teachers in the exploration of the creative process of a selected art form, rather than to develop a final performance/product; and to provide broad cultural and geographic access to quality arts experiences. Grants are awarded for bringing a professional artist or a traditional community artist to the school to work with students in a residency format, or in short term artist visits, assembly programs, teacher workshops, after-school or summer school projects, etc. Grants are also awarded to help arts organizations and schools work together to develop necessary and/or innovative programs that enhance established curricula for the benefit of the students. For example, a local symphony's members could teach string instrument lessons at a school that has no string program and no available resources to establish one.

An example of a successful folk arts in education project that was funded by the Wisconsin Arts Board involved bringing a folklorist into an elementary school for a three-week residency. The folklorist trained 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in how to document traditional art forms in their community. Students interviewed and photographed such diverse artists as a Ukrainian egg painter and a Scottish bagpiper. They transcribed sections of the interviews and created an archive of these materials in the school's library. The project culminated with a festival at which many of the traditional artists exhibited, demonstrated and/or performed their work, with the student-researchers acting as interpreters for the public.

Applications for Community Development Project Grants will be available from the Wisconsin Arts Board in late December '99 or early January '00. The postmark deadline for applying is February 15, 2000. Contact WAB staff if you have questions or would like assistance in planning a project or completing the application. ❖

## Lesson Plans Wanted!

Have you developed and taught successful folklife lessons or units? If so, then the Pennsylvania Alliance for Arts Education (PAAE), part of the Kennedy Center Alliance for Arts Education Network, wants to hear from you.

PAAE is seeking lesson plans that cover folklife concepts. If accepted, they will be published in an upcoming book. An honorarium of \$200 will be paid to authors of lesson plans selected for publication. They'd like plans in the following areas: 1) folk, popular and elite cultural processes, 2) folklore traditions, 3) folk art traditions, 4) folk music and dance, 5) customs, 6) foodways, 7) celebrations.

The lesson plans can be in any format that will effectively convey their meaning but handwritten materials will not be reviewed unless they are samples of student work. Plans must be the submitter's original work. If previously published, the submitter must either hold the copyright or have written permission for PAAE to reproduce. All materials will be treated with confidentiality. Mailed materials will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed and postage paid envelope.

Respond either by: email sent to [PAAE@aol.com](mailto:PAAE@aol.com); file in "Word" format sent to [PAAE@aol.com](mailto:PAAE@aol.com); fax sent to 800-782-4289; or mail sent to PAAE, Box 678, Immaculata College, Immaculata, PA 19345. ❖

## WAB Folk Arts Staff

The Wisconsin Arts Board is the state agency responsible for the support and development of the arts throughout Wisconsin. Our office is at 101 E. Wilson St., Madison, WI 53702. Our web site address is <http://www.arts.state.wi.us>.

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### For Local Folk Arts Projects:

Ruth Olson,  
Local Folk Arts Program Coordinator  
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*The Folk Arts Educator* is also available on-line. Find it on the Wisconsin Arts Board's web site, <http://www.arts.state.wi.us> ❖



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